

# **Wise Men Still Seek Him**

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## Wise Men Still Seek Him

*Isaiah 60:1-6 and Matthew 2:1-12*

### Introduction

- Have any of you every seen a shooting star? How about a comet? Ever wonder why some stars shine brighter in the night sky than others?
- Well, I remember when I was a little girl about 7 years old, my dad woke me up in the middle of the night to take my sister and I out to see Haley's Comet. Any of you have a similar experience? We went out to a corn field in the middle of nowhere where there were no artificial lights and looked up and waited. And waited. And waited. And I think I eventually fell asleep.
- Astrology a big business in the days that Jesus was born – people looked up in order to look forward.
- Fortunately for the wise men in our story for this morning when they looked up at the night sky, they actually saw something. Something wonderful. The star. Not just any star, but THE star. And so they followed it. And it pointed the way for them. The way to the Christ-child.

### So, who were these wise men?

- There are many traditions about the wise men...some have called them kings, others have given them names, and some have even thought that they were descendents of the sons of Noah in the Old Testament and the progenitors of the three races of humankind. We really are not sure of who they are...and it is important to remember that these traditions are just that – traditions. We do know that this is the only appearance they make in Matthew's gospel.
- It's their only appearance and there's a reason why... they bring about the 'epiphany of the Christ-child'. **Epiphany**... that's a funny word. You don't hear it every day. It actually means "to show," "to make known," or "to reveal". It's also a season in the church year that extends from now until Ash Wednesday, when the season of Lent will begin. Epiphany celebrates the coming of the wise men to the Christ-child and "revealing" that Christ was Lord and King of the whole world.

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- Like I said before, the Wise men – magoi in Greek (can everybody say that together? )– could be a number of things...the most probable meaning is that they were astrologers, not kings. They have traveled a long way in search of Jesus. They had been following that star for probably more than a whole year!
  - More importantly, it means that they didn't come to visit Jesus on the same night he was born like many of the popular images show us, it was a little while later. Some scholars say it could have been up to two years later. And the wise men visited Jesus at the house of Joseph and Mary, not in the stable.
- The Wise Men for Matthew represent the fulfillment of Isaiah 60:1-6, which prophesies about the pilgrimage of the rulers of the nations to coming Jerusalem to worship Israel's God, bringing gifts of gold and frankincense.
  - Isa 60 – Israel was supposed to be a lighthouse for the nations. Now that they are coming back from Exile, they are supposed to be a lighthouse again. Prophecy fulfilled in Matthew 2:1-12 because of the wise men's visit. The wise men reveal that Jesus is the light for the nations.

## What did the wise men do when they arrived in Judea?

- They followed the star....the light in the night sky led them to the light of the world. They searched for the Christ-child.
- The star moved across the sky to lead them to where the baby was. They followed the light and they searched. Do we?
- The wise men were Gentiles. They didn't know anything about the Old Testament or any of the prophecies about the Jewish Messiah, yet they knew that Jesus was a king and accepted him.
- In contrast, Herod, the Jews in Jerusalem, the chief priests and scribes, who knew the Scriptures very well, did not recognize that this baby who was born was indeed their long-awaited Messiah. They rejected Jesus as their king and Messiah.
- The wise men expected to find a king, so they went first to the palace in Jerusalem. But Jesus was not there.
- They found him with his mother and father in a house, not a palace.
- When they found Jesus, they worshipped.
- **These Gentile wise men had the appropriate response to Jesus – they worshipped him. This should be our appropriate response, too.** When we seek Jesus and find him, do we worship? Better yet – do we even seek Jesus and search for him? These wise men had been traveling for a long time, possibly up to a year or more, and they looked for Jesus. They

searched endlessly until they found him. It's a search that is never too late to start.

- Gifts:
  - The Scriptures tell us of three gifts that the wise men presented to Jesus. We know them well: gold, frankincense and myrrh.
  - According to scholars, frankincense was imported from Arabia and was a “fragrant gum resin from various trees and bushes used to make sacred incense.” Myrrh was also a “fragrant gum resin, but was from trees abundant in south Arabia and north Ethiopia and was used in a variety of ways – in perfume, holy oil and incense. It also served as a burial spice.” (Allison p. 27)
  - Some scholars have suggested some possible meanings for these three gifts. And other scholars suggest that because of the three gifts, there were three wise men. And just to clear things up... we really don't know! Scripture doesn't specify. It's nice to imagine what these three gifts could have meant, but the Scriptures don't specifically tell us what they were for.
  - The magi's gifts symbolize their loyalty and submission to Jesus.

## Conclusion

### **Why should we care about the wise men today?**

- The truth of Christ's birth comes first to the Gentiles. It is ironic that non-Jews find fulfillment, while 'all Jerusalem' is fearful.
- The magi may not have come to faith, but they were used by God as an example for how Jesus should be treated when He is encountered: they worshipped him and gave him gifts. When we find the Messiah, do we do the same? Do we kneel down and worship him? Do we give him our best gifts? Do we rejoice? Do we even know what these things mean? Do we know how to rejoice? (pause)
- The revelation of the Christ-child doesn't come to Jews, it comes to Gentiles from the East, the magi.
- I wonder if we would do what the wise men did. I wonder if we would travel a long, long way to find Jesus. Are we relentless, tireless like the wise men? Do we give up too easily when we can't find Jesus right away or our prayers aren't answered in the way that we want?
- Do wise men still seek Him today?

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David Garland:

- **Irony: the religious insiders, who knew the Law and Prophets and who ought to have rejoiced at Messiah's birth, were either indifferent to what they knew or, worse, were against Christ; whereas the outsiders, those who were about as distant as they could be theologically or geographically from concern about the Jewish Messiah, end up joyfully lavishing gifts upon him and kneeling before him in worship.**
- The chief priests and scribes and Herod all missed the miracle. They had all the knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures to tell them where to look for Jesus, yet they did not see him. I wonder if this is true today. I wonder if we who have the knowledge of the Scriptures still miss the miracle of the Christ.

Wise men do still seek him. Wise men and women and children search to find the baby in the manger. They wait for the baby to be revealed as Messiah. And when they seek him, they find Him. And they worship and rejoice and share Him with others. May we be so bold to do the same.

Amen.